

# Mindful

# DECON



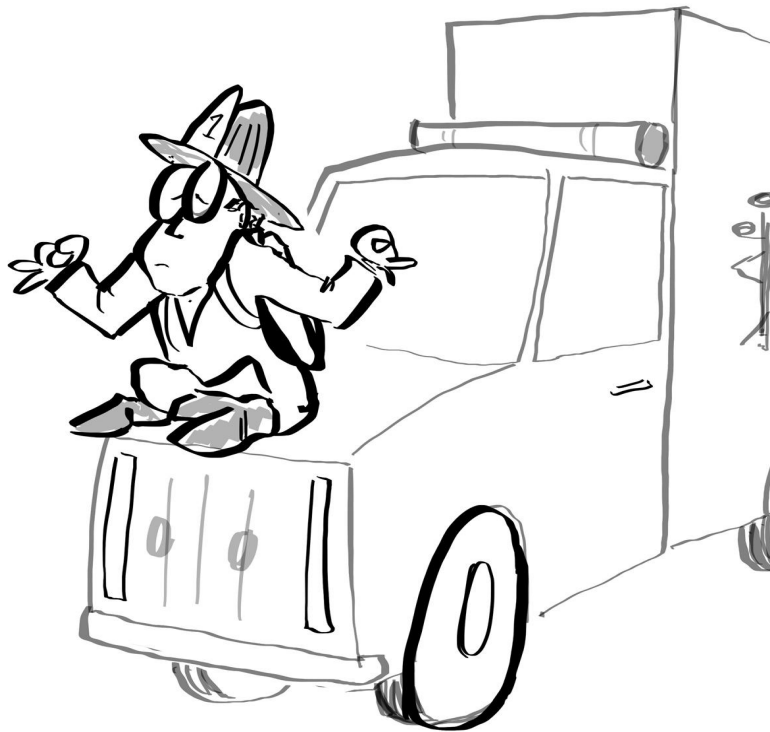
WELLNESS TOOLS FOR  
FIRST RESPONDERS

ARTWORK BY LIEUTENANT AARON MILLER

# Mindful Decon

## *Civilian selfcare vs Mindful Decontamination*

“What the *\*Bleep\** is selfcare?!” asked one of the coolest first responders...ever. This lieutenant’s question was the impetus for Mindful Decon. Telling a first responder to practice the same selfcare as civilians is neglectful and, quite frankly, ignorant. Continually witnessing traumatic events requires more processing than just taking a bath or a time-out. First responders are *actively-in-battle*, which requires special tools to self regulate while maintaining a battle-ready mindset. Mindful Decon was created by first responders as a proactive approach to process traumatic stress and emotional exposure while remaining mentally fit. Practiced regularly, these power tools will decrease cumulative stress while laying a strong foundation to process acute stress and events. If we are mandated to *physically* decontaminate from the job then, given the mind/body connection, wouldn’t it be wise to *mindfully decontaminate* as well?



## *How to use this Handbook*

Mindful Decon explores the most relevant tips, tricks, and tools to understand and manage the physiological effects of traumatic stress with first responders. You will see familiar themes running *repeatedly* throughout this book. Repetition is great for installing info so just let it be absorbed. Make mental notes...

The goal here would be to personally *experience* every tool in this book to create a database from which you can pick and choose when needed for yourself, your family members, civilians, and your fellow brothers and sisters. Some theories or approaches will resonate more than others but it is most effective if each of these techniques is explored at least once to establish some sort of muscle memory. The Mindful Decon Initiative strives to plant supportive seeds with the responsibility lying on the individual to water these seeds, watch them grow, and then enjoy the fruits of their labor. Sheer poetry..... 😊

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## *Physiological Effects of Traumatic Stress*

First responders experience significantly different stressors than the average civilian. High intensity situations, long hours, sleep deprivation, long work hours, time away from family, traumatic events, sensory bombardment, & inconsistent leadership lead to hypervigilance, traumatic cumulative stress, compassion fatigue, PTSD, addiction, divorce, and suicide. Geeesh! 😞 It is an unachievable goal to remain high functioning in extreme environments without proper self regulation tools to increase our capacity to thrive. Civilians need us...but not at the expense of our physical and emotional health.

Trauma and stress are stored in the right side of our brains. As information is received through our senses, the amygdala in our brain activates a fight, flight, or freeze response if deemed necessary. As a first responder our amygdala is continuously activating our *fight* response which prepares our body for the next battle.

The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) is activated, speeding up the bodily processes necessary for emergencies such as blood flow, hormones (cortisol & adrenaline), respiration, heart rate, & vision. Simultaneously, the SNS slows down bodily processes that are less important such as digestion, urination, defecation, and salivation.

Our bodies normally attempt to return to a Parasympathetic state once the charged event has passed. However, the continuous traumatic demands of first responders compounded by sleep deprivation and lack of support prevent us from effectively returning to homeostasis. Mindful Decon focuses on providing self-regulating power tools specifically tested to address the physiological effects attached to our profession. Stimulating the vagus nerve, engaging the senses, and activating particular brain waves are 3 important goals for regulation to be addressed. Believe it or not, we have some quick and effective techniques that can work within minutes so just keep on readin'... 😊😊

# *Power Concepts*

## *Power of Self*

Every single one of us is an amazing unique flawed bada\$\$ striving to be the best version of ourselves. First responders are the best of humankind, yet the demands of the job take a huge toll on us physically and emotionally. Practicing “self-care” in this type of profession is just not enough and that is why we designed the Mindful Decon platform. Remember... You are needed. You are loved. You are appreciated...so let's keep you functioning at your best. 😊

Just like Dorothy's red slippers, our power tools have been with us this entire time; our senses, breath, feeling states, and our drive to self-soothe and create. Somewhere along the way we veered off course. So let's re-engage these basic theoretical elements to build a healthy, solid foundation to incorporate these power tools.

### **Our Senses**

So basic, right? The good, the bad, and the ugly are all experienced and translated through our five senses; sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. First responders are exposed to a lot of crap through the senses. The right side of the brain, responsible for sensory input, calls upon the amygdala for the reaction of fight, flight, or freeze. (Sorry to be repetitive but this is important..) Sometimes these sensory experiences get stuck in our minds requiring some extra tools for self regulation. A certain smell, image, sound, touch, or taste can have a positive or a negative association. Flashbacks and PTSD symptoms can be thought of as unprocessed sensory experiences that the amygdala hasn't reconciled. The good news here is that anything experienced through our senses can also be reregulated through our senses. We can fix this...



## Our Breath

What would we do without our breath?! Uhhhh....nothing since we wouldn't be alive. So why do we take the healing power of our breath for granted? Every single one of us enjoyed deep belly breathing as babies but this too becomes distorted throughout our life's journey. Dysregulation and stress are stored in our body, which can sometimes manifest itself through shallow breathing. Extreme shallow breathing can result in a panic attack. (An interesting tidbit: it is physically impossible to have a panic attack if you are deep breathing. 😞)

So why is it so important to "take a deep breath"?! It's all about stimulating the vagus nerve, the longest nerve in the body, which is responsible for the stabilization of abnormal electrical activity in the brain. Deep breathing stimulates the vagus nerve which bonds with the parasympathetic control of the heart, lungs, and digestive tract. The way we breathe directly affects our physical and emotional health which means that breathing *into* our stress and our emotions instead of ignoring them will allow the body to process the negativity. This prevents us from storing stress physiologically.

Why don't ya try it right now?! *Lean INTO* your stress, take a deep breath in, and release slowly.....

## Our Feeling States

Each one of us came into this world experiencing four basic feelings; mad, sad, glad, and scared. To be truly balanced is to be able to experience each one of these feeling states *rationally* at any given time. Irrational expression of these feelings can lead to dysfunction, so it's important to check ourselves when necessary. Too much sadness can become depression. Too much anger can turn to rage. Too much fear can lead to panic. Too much happiness is unachievable. We set these unattainable goals to always be "happy" but happiness is at the extreme end of this spectrum and is fleeting. Being ***CONTENT*** is our ultimate balancing goal and is certainly achievable.

When our emotions are extra charged it is important to check the opposite feeling states to explore which emotion you may be neglecting. For example, if we are experiencing anxiety or panic attacks it would be helpful to look at our sadness or anger to explore whether they are being neglected. If we are feeling sadness or depression, maybe explore your anger or fear to see if these emotions are being neglected. If you are feeling angry or rageful, check in with sadness or fear to explore if they are being neglected. Here's an example. If someone cuts you off in traffic this would possibly elicit anger which could be rationally expressed by cussing or pounding the steering wheel. An irrational expression of anger would be to chase the driver down or get out of your car and attack them, right? It's important for us to look at the *opposite* feeling state here to see if another emotion might need to be explored. Possibly we felt *fear* that we almost crashed or were injured, and that resulted in the expression of anger.

If you want to process an emotion, it is important that you "meet yourself where you are at" by rationally expressing the presenting emotion *first* then review the other neglected feeling states. Mindful Decon tools provide some safe, expressive ways to release your anger, sadness, or fear throughout this book. Remember, our ultimate goal

is to experience these 4 emotions *rationaly* while always being able to return home to our balanced and comfortable **content** state.

**MAD**



**SAD**



content

**GLAD**



**SCARED**





## Our Self-Soothing Drive

As a child, did you ever suck your thumb? Or a pacifier? Did you have a unique motion that calmed you? Maybe you had a special blanket or stuffed animal?

We were born with an innate need to soothe ourselves to provide comfort and calm. Yet, over time our need to self-soothe can become distorted in the form of negative habits, patterns, or binges. Because this urge cannot be denied it is beneficial to acknowledge this innate need and self-soothe accordingly. Eating too much crappy 'comfort' food, drinking too much alcohol, retail therapy, and even binge exercising are all forms of dysfunctional self-soothing patterns. In the following chapters we will provide some effective methods for self-regulation while still allowing and expecting each of us to enjoy a good time.....respectfully.

## Our Creative Drive

Snowmen, mudpies, sandcastles, legos, sidewalk chalk....we were *born* with the innate drive to create (and destroy). You see...?! We were all *born* artists but somewhere along the way we lost our freedom to create without judgment or criticism. Look at any four year old making art and you will see a child who believes their museum quality work is absolutely amazing and Picasso-esque. "I am not an artist" does not hold weight here because we are ALL artists who just need to become reacquainted with our previous non judgemental creative self.

Creativity is a natural complement to the helping professions which require a large amount of creative problem solving to save lives and protect our own. Unfortunately, our creative thinking is surrounded by total chaos and sensory overload in the midst of destruction. The creative arts engage the senses by using creation to *counterbalance* the destruction experienced on the job.

The benefits of the creative arts are plentiful and have been documented thoroughly through copious amounts of empirical research. In fact, the World Health Organization (2017?) conducted a scoping review of over 3000 studies researching the effects of the arts on health and wellbeing. The results identified "a major role for the arts in prevention of ill health, promotion of health, and management and treatment of illness across the lifespan". Yet again we are seeing the positive benefits of an innate drive that was designed to serve the natural purpose of wellbeing.

# Power of Opposites

Soooo... if we are considered to be energetic creatures then we must be composed of positive and negative charges with our true balance lying somewhere in the middle, RIGHT? Think of a seesaw. Too much or too little weight on either end will create imbalance which needs to be readjusted to return to a weightless, balanced state. Whenever you are feeling out of balance, review some opposites in your life which might need to be readjusted. It is a simple yet effective concept that runs throughout our lives.

The Feeling States (Mad/Sad/Glad/Scared pg.?! ) are a perfect example of opposite emotions that, when balanced, establish a state of satisfaction or *contentment*. We need opposites in order to have a comparison to judge a particular feeling. For example, how would we know what happiness felt like if we couldn't compare it to sadness or anger or fear? How could we experience feeling strong if we couldn't compare it to feeling weak, frail, or sickly? Some of these polarities may be running naturally throughout our lives right now.

True balance is living neutralized with *fleeting* moments experienced at either end of the pole. This concept of neutralization can be "boring" to first responders who live life jacked-up due to the bipolar extremes of the profession. We need excitement, energy, and stimulation to feed our dysregulated state that is created by sleep deprivation, cumulative stress, and trauma. We can aspire to live at the positive end of the pole being "happy," but long term existence in this state is truly unrealistic. Enjoy the moments of happiness deeply with the knowledge that we shall return to our attainable satisfactory base of *contentment*.

## Some opposites:

Positive/Negative  
Chaos/Control  
High/low  
Love/Hate  
Creation/Destruction  
Happy/Sad  
Strong/Weak  
Light/Dark

# *Power of Distractions*

Don't we all love distractions !?! Well, believe it or not, distractions are an important element to manage overcharged emotions. But, to be clear, there are healthy distractions and then there are unhealthy distractions.

Unhealthy: The traumatic stress, sleep deprivation, and grueling hours experienced in the first responder profession create a biological state of increased cortisol, adrenaline, and elevated heart rate. Living in this perpetually charged physiological state without self-regulation influences us to seek out stimulation to keep us entertained, charged, or activated. Phrases like “chasing the shiny object” or “squirrel!!!” are used to sometimes describe our low attention span. Sitting in a quiet space for too long can become unsettling and uncomfortable. Sometimes we need to occupy our time to prevent the dark thoughts and images from creeping in. Peace begins to equate boredom which can then lead to the search for distractions like excessive drinking, cavorting, or naughtiness to keep us charged. This type of distraction seeking stems from the physiological challenges of the job which *can* be regulated by practicing some of the power tools listed in this book.

Healthy: Distractions can be helpful in tough times stemming from traumatic stress. A healthy distraction can assist in diverting deeper aspects of trauma such as anxiety attacks or abreactions. By incorporating a different activity, especially if it engages both sides of the brain, the senses, or your breath, we can distract the body and mind to provide a solid foundation for processing. Dark humor is already used by some responders as a distraction from the severity of a traumatic event. This form of processing can be beneficial to some yet offensive to others.

# Brain Power



Despite what those sexy firefighter calendars are trying to convey, first responders do not function on their good looks alone... 😊😊. Saving and protecting lives in a continually nonstatic profession requires creative problem-solving skills by those who are definitely not faint of heart. In order to fully understand the operating power of Mindful Decon tools we must briefly discuss our beautiful brain. This will be short, sweet but power packed....

## Whole Brain Processing (left brain/right brain)

The two sides of the brain, the left side and the right side, hold their own individual properties yet work together for balanced whole brain functioning. Responsible for controlling the right side of the body, the **left brain** functions include logic, analytic thought, language, numbers, science, reading, and writing. The **right brain** controls the left side of the body and is responsible for emotions, creativity, imagination, intuition, insight, art, and music. The perfect balance is achieved when these *opposite* sides are working in unison.

Traumatic stress tends to activate the **right** side of the brain and deactivate the **left** side of the brain. Verbalization and talk therapy thus become less effective tools for processing trauma because the cognitive side of the brain is shut down with the amygdala running strong. So why is verbalization the only tool that first responders have been taught to process cumulative trauma especially when that side of our brain is M.I.A.?! 😞😞

## Brain Waves

Okay, stay with us....you may already know this stuff but we need to set things up...

Our behavior, thoughts, and emotions are communicated between neurons located throughout our brain. There are five different Brainwave States which occur at different frequencies; **Delta**, **Theta**, **Alpha**, **Beta**, and **Gamma**.

The **Delta** wave is the slowest recorded brainwave associated with the deepest levels of relaxation and sleep where healing and regeneration are most stimulated.

The **Theta** brain wave occurs in a sleep or relaxed state and is linked to implicit learning, memory, and intuition.

The **Alpha** brain wave indicates that the brain is in a resting state and is associated with the “here-and-now” and “being present”.

The **Beta** brain wave, fast and attentive, is commonly associated with a normal waking state of consciousness and responsible for decision making and problem solving.

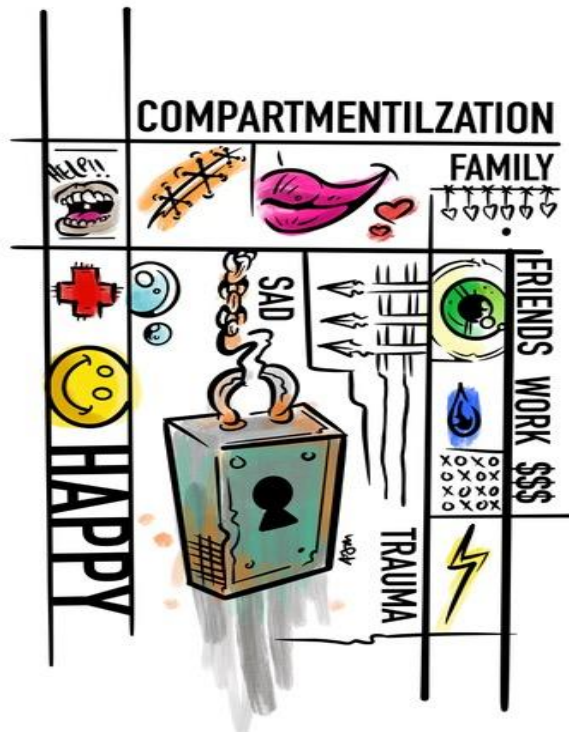
The **Gamma** brain wave is the fastest brain wave produced and occurs when we are highly alert and conscious.

First Responders *routinely and perpetually* engage the **Gamma** brain wave, the most heightened brainwave necessary for activation in emergency situations. Add sleep deprivation to the already heightened activity of the Gamma brain wave and we have created the perfect storm; too much brain activation with too little regenerative, healthy sleep and calm. An effective way to re-regulate this high frequency state would be to activate a lesser stimulated brain wave such as **Theta** or **Delta**. Specific techniques in the Power Tools section will assist in reaching a calmer state; ie., Havening, the creative arts, bilateral breathing. Stay tuned... 🙌

# Power of Compartmentalization

The power of our mind and body is just beyond any sort of reason or comprehension. We have innate protective mechanisms designed to allow us to experience certain challenges of life that would otherwise have rendered us useless. Ugliness and horror are experienced by first responders on the job every day. Our beautiful mind innately files these heinous experiences away into the “work” category allowing us to get into our cars and return home with a reasonable amount of detached sanity. This is called compartmentalization, a defense mechanism necessary for all first responders to function regularly and effectively.

Compartmentalization is the first responder’s gift but also our blessed curse. The same isolated bubbles that protect us from extreme experiences incidentally create isolation and distance from others. This type of isolation causes the ability to reach out for help to become too foreign and nearly impossible for first responders. How can we reach out for help when our primary goal is to help *others, not ourselves*? We physically and emotionally do not know *how* to do it. We have zero muscle memory and minimal self regulating skills to remain mentally fit for this grueling job. First responders are in the “superhero” category. But, guess what?! Even superheroes have their weaknesses. Cumulative traumatic stress without self regulating tools and neuroplasticity IS our kryptonite. Unlike Superman, we have psychosensory practice tools to protect us from our kryptonite.



## Peer Support



The Beatles said it best-” *I get by With A Little Help From My Friends*”. Truth....

Our peers know firsthand the beauty and the ugliness of our job. There is an unspoken collective understanding between us that needs no explanation. Our brothers and sisters can provide us with comfort, safety, solace, understanding, escape, laughter, and **fun**. (We all need to have more fun in our lives, right?!) Peers of this sort provide a strong platform for healthy longevity in such chaotic professions. Mindful Decon will help us support each other so we can *thrive* instead of solely survive.

Wouldn't it be amazing if Mindful Decon was part of our basic training?! We would then be establishing a wellness CULTURE that would be destigmatized and part of the norm.

## What's Normal? 🤪

Isn't *that* the million dollar question?! The first responder profession is not “normal”. It is extreme. We are superheroes with superpowers, right? We fly into situations full of chaos, screams, excrement, blood, brains, sounds, smells, and are expected to save the day and be totally unaffected, no processing necessary. Ummmm...not so much....

Of course we are affected by cumulative stress and trauma which is considered to be a normal response to *abnormal* circumstances! We like to think of **normal** as having a typical, expected response to a given situation or event. A normal response to playing with a puppy would be joy. A normal response to witnessing a child die would be sorrow, pain, disappointment, or a sense of failure.

We were not built to continually “suck it up buttercup” and the repercussions of this profession can take its toll on us. There is a huge stigma in our profession that if we show even the slightest chink in our armour then we are considered to be weak, unstable, and unworthy of performing our job. **How about we are having a normal response to an abnormally challenging profession?!** Leaving our repetitive trauma



and stress to remain unaddressed creates layers and layers of debris that create build-up in our capacity-to-function-bucket leading to a decreased ability to process acute events, compassion fatigue, PTSD, or suicide. Don't wait for leadership to change this...know that being affected by cumulative traumatic stress is **normal**. So, it is up to *us* to personally demystify this BS and arm ourselves with the most effective processing tools to remain mentally fit. Let's get started...

# Power Tools

Now, for the good stuff...

The Power Tools section is meant to be experiential so please try each one of these at least once for muscle memory and neuroplasticity. The goal here is to create a Mindful Decontamination toolbox which you can draw from as needed for yourself, family members, civilians, or peers. Some of these tools are tips & tricks whereas others are full blown techniques for self regulation and processing. Some tools can be used as needed and some can be practiced routinely to decrease your cumulative stress. Remember, we are responsible for our own mental fitness so taking care of ourselves **FIRST** will allow us to properly take care of others. This is not called selfishness. This is called **SELF-LOVE**.



# Tips & Tricks

## Vagus Baby!



### *Quick tips to wake up that Vagus Nerve*

Stimulating the Vagus Nerve will assist in transitioning from the Sympathetic Nervous System (activating) to the Parasympathetic Nervous System (calming/restorative) which is responsible for relaxation (rest & digest). Try each one of these tricks- if not for use on yourself then maybe to help someone else

Yawning; Try to get yourself to yawn... just fake it 'til you make. 'Ever watch an animal yawn in the middle of a wild activity? This is an attempt to self regulate.

Deep Diaphragmatic Breathing; Just a reminder that deep diaphragmatic breathing stimulates the VN. Do this throughout your day, not just during a yoga class. (Although we love yoga!!)

Hummmm; Humming stimulates your vagus nerve which is attached to the vocal cords. The meditative chant 'om' is powerful for this same reason. So proudly and loudly HUMMMMMM away to your favorite song! BTW-have you ever seen an angry person walk around humming?! 😞😞 Just sayin'.....

Loud Vocals; Along the lines of HUMMING, reading out loud and singing out loud stimulates that beautiful VN. Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do-it!!!

"RRRRR" Sound; When we make the letter "RRRRRRRR" sound we lift the soft palate stimulating the VN which calms the nervous system.

Gargling: Gargling is a great way to capture the VN's attention since the throat is heavily engaged in this activity.

Laughter: Any kind of laughter for 10 minutes stimulates diaphragmatic breathing which stimulates the VN and who doesn't like to laugh?! (Note\* when you find yourself feeling down check and see if fun and laughter might be missing 🤔🤔)

Posture: Your emotions can affect your posture and your posture can affect your emotions. So raise yourself up, straighten your back, and pull your shoulders back down and back by your ears. Lengthen your spine so the Vagus nerve is more open to operate. Change your posture, change your mood. 😡 (it's difficult to be emotionally sad with a strong posture.)

Water Splash: Splashing cold water on your face will stimulate the VN (however the reason here is unknown)...

Soften Your Gaze: Tunnel vision occurs sometimes during anxiety attacks and stressful situations. Pointing your eyes forward, notice the outer edges of your periphery and see if you can make out the shapes. This trick can 'soften your gaze' disrupting the narrowing effort of your visual scope and stimulating the VN..

## Miscellaneous Tips

Tense Up!: Yep...you heard that correctly. Choose a muscle group in your body, tense that area as tightly as you can, hold it for 5-7 seconds, and then release your tension fully with an exhaled breath. Try this with different muscle groups and notice how you feel after the tension is released. Body awareness is crucial for grounding. 😊

Skipping: It's hard to skip when you're mad, sad, or scared. Try it... 😊

Balloon Toss: Blow up a medium sized balloon, throw it into the air, and try to prevent it from hitting the ground. Try this by yourself or with others. This simple trick loosens the body which unconsciously stiffens during stress and trauma. See?! Whoever said taking care of yourself wasn't fun?!



Rocking: Rocking from side-to-side is a bilateral self soothing motion. Try rocking or swaying left to right /right to left whether standing or sitting. **Movement is key to processing our stress and prevents us from getting STUCK.**

## *GROUND-ing tip...*

Let's admit it...we are clearly dependent on our phones and computers for connection. Although this electronic ethos is amazing, we can become prone to isolation, insecurity, and informational overload. A nice way to counterbalance this artificial connection is to physically connect with the earth which provides a natural source of electrons and subtle electrical fields. Find a safe soft place outside and put

your bare feet onto the ground. FEEEEEL the grass, mud, rocks, sand. Twenty minutes is the goal here but do it as long as you would like. This is quite literally "grounding" yourself. For an added bonus combine this earthly exercise with some of the other tips or tricks in this book; deep breathing, humming, listening to music, Havening.... (Better yet, breathe in the negative ions released from flowing water to counteract the positive ions released from electronics.)



## *The 20 Second HUG*

Instead of just giving someone a quick, gratuitous hug, try to hug another person for the uncomfortably long time of 20 seconds. 🤗🤗🤗ummmm RIGHT?!! That seems like forevrrrrrr!

BUT...

Studies have shown that a 20 second hug releases the feel-good hormone oxytocin which has been shown to boost the immune system and reduce stress. Human touch is extremely important for physical and emotional well being. Not to worry if there isn't another person around to hug! We can still produce oxytocin through the Self Havening Technique described in Chapter #?. 🤗🤗

## *The Adrenaline Blow-Out Technique*

The Blow-Out Technique is a quick and effective tool used to regulate your nervous system when it's in a super charged state like anger, anxiety, aggression, or fear. Using this tool on your own or in a group at the beginning/end of an event provides a collective calming ritual that pushes out carbon dioxide to re-energize you.

How To:

1. Make a tight fist and raise your hands over your head

2. Take a deep breath in and hold it for 2-3 seconds.
3. While exhaling completely, pull your arms down quickly with your fists landing shoulder level, touching your shoulders.
4. Repeat this 3-5 times.  
(Follow-up with low-to-high breathing, bilateral breathing, or Havening for deeper calm)



## *Crown Pull*

The prefrontal cortex, located right behind your forehead, is the center for logical thought. During stressful events and trauma, blood leaves this area to assist other areas for immediate action. The Crown Pull massage will bring the blood flow back to the prefrontal cortex, clearing the mind to assist in reregulation.

How to:

Place your thumbs on the temples with your fingers touching in the center of your forehead. With a good amount of pressure, pull your fingers from the center of the forehead to the sides. Repeat this motion 3-5 times.

# 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Grounding Tool

Here's a quick and easy tool to summon the senses and uses distractions for grounding; which is mindfulness, 'being present', or the 'here-and-now'. (Geeeeesh. 😞) Panic and anxiety can result from living in the past or focusing on the future. Anything incorporating our 5 senses will break the anxious state and assist us in returning "home" (homeostasis). Try this tip, if not for yourself then to help others.

HOW TO:

- \*Name 5 things you can SEE.*
- \*Name 4 things you can TOUCH.*
- \*Name 3 things you can HEAR.*
- \*Name 2 things you can SMELL.*
- \*Name 1 thing you can TASTE.*



*(Do this tool with Self-Havening for an added benefit...)*



## *Low-2-High Breathing*

There are many breathing techniques out there so we are making this easy for you to remember.

### **Inhale to a count of 4**

\*Inhale through the nose to regulate airflow due to the restricted size of the nostrils which slows breath and corrects the diaphragm and invites calm.

### **Exhale to a count of 6**

\*Slower exhalation encourages deeper oxygenation of cells and engages the parasympathetic nervous system.

When in doubt just remember to exhale for a longer period of time...

## *Bilateral Breathing Exercise*

Remember how important whole brain processing is? Well, here's an easy way to engage both sides while promoting calm. The image below will show the three points around the eye which will be used for this exercise; the point inside your eyebrow, the point outside your eye, and the point underneath your eye. These are traditional acupressure points. This exercise will be alternating both hands on the left side point and then the right side point. It is your choice whether you would like to think of a particular thought or emotion or body sensation while doing this exercise because this technique can decrease some of the associated charge.

### **How to:**

#### **Close your eyes.**

1. Place your first 2 fingers from your left hand on your left inner eyebrow point. Take a long slow deep INHALE into that point and slowly exhale when you are ready.
2. Switch to your right hand and place your first 2 fingers on the right inner eyebrow point and INHALE deeply and slowly into that point. Exhale slowly when you are ready.
3. Switch to your left hand and place your first 2 fingers onto the left outside eye point and deeply INHALE. Exhale slowly when you are ready.
4. Switch to your right hand and place your first 2 fingers onto the right outside eye point and INHALE deeply. Exhale slowly when you are ready.

5. Switch to your left hand and place your first 2 fingers underneath your left eye and slowly deeply INHALE in. Exhale slowly when you are ready.
6. Switch to your right hand and place your first 2 fingers underneath your right eye and slowly INHALE deeply. Exhale slowly when you are ready.

Do this exercise as often as you like or until the desired feeling of calm has been achieved. This can help prepare you for sleep as well.

## *Tapping...*

The points highlighted in this image can be used for tapping or modified EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique). This method gently stimulates the energy lines on the body through acupressure points.

(Try each of these methods and see which ones resonate with you. All of these tools can affect us differently but it's crucial to experience them at least once.) It's your choice whether you would like to focus on a bothersome emotion, thought, or body sensation while doing this technique. ( The amount of times to tap can be subjective but we have suggested starting with 20.)



### **How to:**

1. Begin with the point on the outside of your hand and begin tapping it 20 times with your other hand.
2. Using BOTH hands, tap both inner eyebrow points for the count of 20.
3. Using BOTH hands, tap both outer eye points to the count of 20.
4. Using BOTH hands, tap both underneath eye points to the count of 20.
5. Using your dominant hand, tap under your nose for the count of 20.
6. Using your dominant hand, tap under your bottom lip for the count of 20.
7. Using BOTH hands, tap underneath your clavicle points.
8. Crossing your arms and using BOTH hands, tap the outside chest points.
9. Take a slow deep breath and continue as needed or until the desired effect is reached.

# *Havening Technique (HT)*

Finally! We get to introduce you to the Havening Technique. The word Havening means “to put into a safe place” which is exactly what this technique has the capacity to do. Based on neuroscience, this psychosensory technique uses applied touch to activate a Delta/Theta Brain Wave, the slowest and deepest of the brain waves found in restorative sleep. This type of brainwave has the ability to open calcium channels in postsynaptic neurons. Now...why is this important?!

During traumatic stress, the amygdala neurons release their warriors, the AMPA receptors, to help us jump into action. These AMPA receptors assist us in functioning during fight, flight, or freeze but they can get stuck in fighting mode. PTSD symptoms can be the result of stuck AMPA receptors in the amygdala but this can be fixed by opening calcium channels for depotentiation, or delinking. As stated above, the Delta/Theta brainwave has the ability to open the calcium channels thus producing calcineurin which unglues the AMPA receptors allowing for depotentiation. The event can no longer return to the long term memory! We need to be AMPA-ed up for our job but continuously operating in this heightened state is unhealthy.

## **Applications of Havening Technique:**

1. Facilitated HT involves a practitioner physically providing the technique.
2. Facilitated Self-HT involves a practitioner who guides the client through the process of self-Havening.
3. Self-HT is performed by the client on their own.

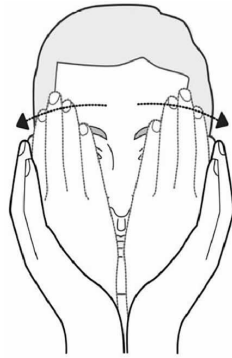
HT can be used to process traumatic events, to provide regulation, or to instill positive affirmations. The power of touch has been proven to decrease cortisol and norepinephrine while increasing oxytocin, GABA, and serotonin. The 3 most (socially acceptable) activated areas of the body are the palms of the hands, the face, and the upper arms.

## **Havening Touch:**

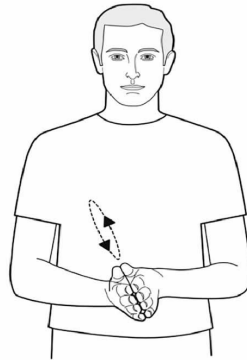
1. Slowly move your palms from the inside of your face outward to the edges and repeat. The HT can be applied above the eyebrows outward, on the cheeks outward, &/or on the entire face outward.
2. Slowly move your palms together in a circular, horizontal, or vertical motion.
3. Cross your arms placing your palms on opposite shoulders. Move your palms, using downward motions, to the elbows.

*\*Feel free to mix and match any of these movements. \*Use a pillow under your arms if you have neck, shoulder pain.*

*\*If you're unable to use your hands then move your eyes from your periphery back and forth from the left to the right without moving your head*



FACE HAVENING



PALM HAVENING



ARM HAVENING

## *Transpirational Havening (TH)*

1. Find a target emotion associated with an event and rate your Subjective Unit of Distress Scale (SUDS) from 0 (lowest) -10 (strongest).
2. Apply HT.
3. Chant the word that represents the emotion; i.e. trapped, trapped, trapped, trapped,... If the word changes, chant the new word. Go with whatever words come up.
4. Continue to HT for 3-5 minutes
5. Recheck the SUD score. If it is still above a 2, repeat the above sequence until the desired effect is reached.

### **Iffirmational Havening (IH)**

\*While Havening, repeat the question of a wished positive or neutral state. "What if I could feel \_\_\_?" "What if I was \_\_\_?" until you actually feel the stated emotion with certainty.

### **Affirmational Havening (AH)**

\*While Havening, chant the positive word from Iffirmational Havening for positive installation. Repeat the word until the desired feeling is achieved.

### **Outcome Havening (OH)**

\*While Havening, envision a desired outcome for an event or occasion that may be bothering you. Refer to IF and AH to end on a positive note.

### **Opposites Havening (Opp.H)**

\*While Havening, chant the negative emotion for a bit. Then switch to the opposite (desired state) of the negative emotion and chant that word. Keep switching back and forth for 3-5 minutes or until a feeling of calm has been achieved. Refer to IH and AH to end on a positive note for installation.

## *Event Havening*

Event Havening should be done with a trained Havening Technique's practitioner. This technique warrants a description because it is such a game-changer for processing trauma in a quick, gentle, and effective manner. Remember, mental fitness does not need to be difficult or painful.

Event Havening doesn't involve rehashing an old event or trauma. Instead, when offering a SUDS score, the client has pulled the traumatic event from the long term memory into the working memory which is all that needs to be done. The Havening Touch is immediately applied by either the practitioner or through Self HT. The client would then be led through three different distractions for a minimum of 7-10 minutes. These distractions could include counting steps on your favorite walking path; naming your favorite foods from A-Z; humming Row, Row, Row Your Boat twice, etc... Three distractions equal one round and end with a low to high breath-inhale for 4 and exhale for 6. The SUDS will be reassessed and if the score is above a two, repeat the same process of HT with distractions until the desired state is achieved. Like always, finish with Affirmational Havening for positive installation.

The activation of a Delta/Theta brainwave along with the use of distractions for 7-10 minutes actually prevents the traumatic event from returning to the long term memory. Some of the events we have experienced stick with us so it's important for us to address this to decrease our cumulative load. The lower the cumulative load the more capable we will be to process acute situations. Reach out to us for an approved list of qualified Havening practitioners to experience this technique. Total game-changer....

# Power of the Creative Arts

YES! Believe it or not, the creative arts have a strong amount of research backing its efficacy on our emotional and physical health. Studies have shown that the creative arts can increase positive emotions, decrease depressive symptoms, reduce stress, decrease anxiety, and even improve immune system functioning. How many times have we gotten lost in a song or a book or a movie? Even observing the creative arts has a significant effect on our health and wellbeing. Why?

Creativity produces a **Theta** brain wave, the second slowest brain wave normally associated with deep meditation, prayer and spiritual awareness. What separates the creative arts from the other Theta brain activities is the fact that we can actually process emotions and experiences through the creative arts. We can have fun while processing our stress and trauma!

By externalizing our internal issues we experience a physical release with an element of distance from the associated emotions. It is much easier to talk about our artwork than it is to talk about our feelings. I mean, who wants to “talk” about their feelings?! No one... First responders are naturally creative on the job because every situation is different and requires a creative solution. But the job is full of destruction. **Creation** is the key to **counterbalance the destruction** experienced as a first responder. So create...ANYTHING! Food, sculptures, music, clothes, furniture, gardens, photographs,...ANYTHING.

## *Ice breakers:*

NOTE\* Art materials can be structured (offering control) or unstructured (offering fluidity). If a more controlled experience is needed, choose pencils, pens, markers, crayons, collage, stamps. Less structured mediums might be oil paints, watercolors, clay, finger paints, and paper mache.

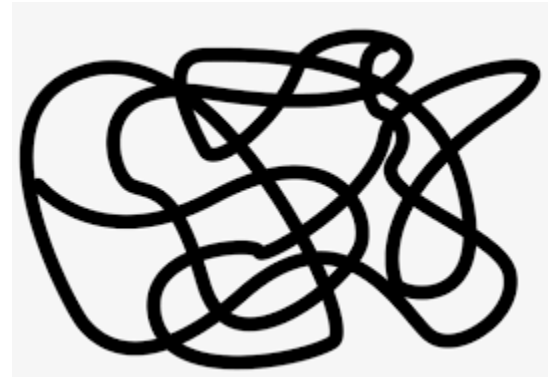
Just DO-odle it!: Grab a piece of scrap paper and a writing tool and just mess around making marks, without an agenda, a plan, a design, or any inhibitions. Doodling is a fantastic way to get back into the artistic process without pressure or judgment. This process provides a physical release which can also activate the meditative theta brain wave. 🙌🙌

Collage: Collage is a super first step to get reacquainted with your non judgemental creative side. Just cut out or tear magazine images that speak to you...no agenda here. Or if you would like a task, tell your story through a collage. Just have fun with it and know that you can't mess any of this up.

Writing: Alright, throw every grammar or spelling lesson out the window for this. Get some scrap paper and write with your nondominant hand whatever you want...cuss

words, complaints, bad thoughts... Just get it physically out of your system and without judgment. When you're done you can color over it completely which is a whole brain activity. You could rip it into shreds and throw it out or create another piece out of it. You could ball it up and throw it at a wall 20 times.

Scribble Chase: Choose something to write with and place it in your opposite hand. Scribble on a large piece of paper for 5-10 seconds. Turn your paper all around until you think you can create something out of the scribble. Then fill in your creation. This exercise breaks down that self-criticism so just have fun with it!



Blind Contour Drawing: Find a subject that you would like to draw. Put your pen/pencil/marker on the paper and draw the subject without taking your pen off of the page and without looking at the subject. This is frustrating but fun to do! Do this many times because there's no harm in it and you will improve your confidence.

Power of Color: We all have our own opinions of specific colors which have been formed through our experiences. Colors have the power to energize us, sadden us, bore us, repel us, and ground us. Which colors speak to you? Which do you like? Which do you hate? Which energize you? Notice what colors surround you. Use your favorite colors to motivate and encourage you when you need a pick-me-up. This could be in the form of clothing, flowers, paint, artwork, foods,...anything that emits the colors you may need. Just try it!

Lights/Darks: (Interesting Fact: It takes the opposite elements of light and dark to create any and all forms. Think about it...we see *nothing* if there is too much light or too much dark.)

With the drawing tool of your choice, choose an object with obvious dark shadows and bright highlights. Without using any lines, try drawing the object only shading in the darks and being aware of the lights. You will see that lights and darks actually create dimension in a drawing. This exercise challenges your mind and preps you for understanding drawing and painting.



Movement: To repeat...movement can prevent freeze responses in the body so try to keep moving. If you're truly brave, dance, skip, or wildly wiggle your body around to keep that stress moving through your body.

Music: Music has the power to change our emotions and energy. It can energize us, make us sad, make us reminiscent, make us agitated... Listen to music, write music, or create your own to get your into that Theta brainwave state. Better yet, listen to your



favorite music and drum 2 sticks or pencils to the beat. The drumming adds a bilateral component which enhances whole brain processing. Have fun!!

Mandala; OHHHH, the amazing Mandala!! Mandalas are an arrangement of simple shapes repeated in a circular pattern. Mandalas are great tools for meditation and containment, whether you are designing one, tracing one, or coloring one. Start by drawing a large circle in pencil. Draw 2 lines through it making it into quarters. Draw a small circle in the center. Add organic shapes repeating them around the circle. Continue until it's finished. (Google this to get more in depth instructions.) Color in the design and trace the lines in an indelible pen when you are done. This is a fun way to activate a Theta brain wave state. Plus, the results are so beautiful! For fun, design mandalas and pass them along to other stations or responders to fill in with color!!



## Samples of Mindful Decon Processing

### TRY:

Use Havening with your palms moving away from your body to “Flick-off” or brush-off the mental debris from a call. Do this as a ritual after every call to build mental strength through muscle memory and neuroplasticity. End with some positive AH for installation.

### TRY:

Substitute a **positive experience** for your negative one.

Start thinking about, talking about, writing about one of your **favorite** calls or moments immediately after a tough event.

Self Haven during this exercise. How did your body *feel* during that **positive** event? What were some **positive** thoughts going through your mind at that time? Does this positive feeling have a particular color/colors that are connected to it? Really soak in that **positive** event and associated color into every cell of your body, feeling it move through your veins and from the top of your head down to your toes.

Chant the positive word associated with your feeling 5 times. Breathe in slowly and deeply into that positivity; inhale to 4/ exhale to 6.  
(Length=3-5 minutes)

TRY:

At the end of your shift, maybe when you are getting into your car, start humming or singing a favorite positive song. Drum each hand slowly to the beat on the desk or dashboard. This will influence your brain to think about the words and notes while stimulating the vagus nerve to calm the body. The drumming will engage both sides of the brain.

OR Add Havening during this exercise instead of drumming.....

Do this everyday. Your mind/body loves repetition and routine.

(Length=3-5 minutes)

TRY:

Try writing down three things you are grateful for at the end of your shift. Close your eyes and start Havening. Feel the gratitude throughout your body flowing through your veins. Associate a color/colors to your gratitude. Soak this all in. Repeat the word "grateful" 5 times. End with a deep inhale to 4 and exhale to 6. Do this every day to build muscle memory and neuroplasticity.

(Length=3-5 Minutes)

TRY:

Going for a walk is a great distraction involving breath and bilateral movement but this experience can be deepened further. On your walk, notice your surroundings and try looking for 3 different types of birds, trees, or objects. Spell each of them.

Name 5 different colors you see on your walk and spell them. This exercise incorporates many healthy techniques in one and can help in grounding yourself to the present moment.

Do the 5,4,3,2,1 Grounding exercise while on this walk.

Count your steps up to 20. Pause and Inhale to 4/exhale to 6.

TRY:

Creativity is all around us, especially in nature. On your walk, collect a variety of leaves, petals, rocks, and twigs. Design a mandala with these natural items. Honor the fact that you're being mindful and decontaminating from any residual stressors. Do this with intention and purpose.

While outdoors, look at the lights and darks closely for this is how every form is created. Break the objects you see into just areas of light and areas or dark. Determine where the light is coming from; above, 45 degree angle, etc. This understanding is what gives drawings depth; lights and darks.

TRY:

Bring a sketchbook with you on a walk. Remember this is just sketching so leave your judgemental critic at home. Quickly draw different things you see. Try just using lines to draw them. Try breaking the objects into only shaded light and darks without any

lines. Try doing a blind contour drawing of anything you see. Mess around and have fun! You might even like some of these...

TRY:

Begin or end your shift, individually or as a group, doing the Blow-Out Technique. Do it three times. This can become a ritual for closure to a shift.

TRY:

Always remember that your senses have been assaulted after a traumatic event. Afterwards, try to engage your senses in a positive way as replacement. Listen to music. Drink something warm and feel the warm mug. Smell a nice essential oil. Look at a happy photo or favorite color. Deep breath as always.

TRY:

Tapping or Bilateral Breathing after a shift will send your body signals of reregulation. Determine which feels best to you and practice the method after a shift or at the end of your day. Again, routines make rituals so practice these for muscle memory.

TRY:

It's important to properly release your anger first before going into calming techniques. When you are experiencing anger doing something physical to get it out safely. Punch a pillow 20 times. Scribble with a red or black marker or crayon on heavy paper until it's covered. Rip paper into pieces repeatedly. Ball up a piece of paper and throw it at the wall 20 times. Punch a punching bag. Whatever you feel safely releases the charge of anger for you. Do it...Remember that there might be some underlying emotions that spring up after the anger is released.

Once calmer try the Blow-Out Technique, Bilateral Breathing, Havening, or creative work. The most important thing here is to try to physically release your anger so you can practice a self-regulating technique afterwards. It is just not fair to ask a furious or rageful person to take deep breaths. Safely and rationally express yourself then move into the calming techniques.

TRY:

Cooking meals can be a chore and duty sometimes. Switch it up and choose one night to create a sensory experience. Plan a special meal to prepare. Play music during the preparation. Smell the various aromas. Feel the products as you are cutting them. Then taste every bite with intention. Invite peers over to share this experience. Enjoy this process recognizing that this was part of your wellness regimen. How fun?!

*Have fun practicing mindful Decon! Build up your toolbox so that you are well-armed to remain fit-for-the-fight. Remember...these tools are not just for you. They are for your brothers and sisters, your family members, and occasionally civilians.*

*You are NEEDED.*

*You are LOVED.*

*You are APPRECIATED.*

**For more information, please reach out to Kathy Sullivan, MAAT, REACE at (843)737-3373 or [www.ashes2art.org](http://www.ashes2art.org).**

\*Mindful Decon is a registered trademark intended for educational purposes only. Reach out to a qualified therapist for therapy. In case of emergency, dial 911 or go directly to your nearest emergency room.



